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KLOUWANG AND ITS CAVES, WEST COAST OF ATCHIN.

TRAVELLING NOTES OF

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FOR three days we remained in sight of the port of Klouwang ⁽¹⁾ without being able to reach it, our vessel, though one of the finest sailers of the Straits, being unable to overcome the resistance offered by the wind and current, which seem to have combined against us. At last, on the morning of the third day, thanks to a light breeze

(¹) The port of Klouwang is situated on the West coast, thirty miles South of Achin Head. The bay is excellent, being sheltered by an almost round and very lofty island, the shores of which are perpendicular cliffs. Thus the port has two entrances, the wider and safer being the Northern, the narrower lying to the South West; the latter is rendered a little dangerous by a line of breakers, which, however, protects the port from the Southerly winds. The anchorage of Klouwang is very good in all seasons, but the port unfortunately can only contain three or four vessels. The Raja is Toncou LAMPASSÉ, who, during the war with Achin, has supplied the Dutch with information regarding the opinions and plans of the Achinese. The river Klouwang is small, and flows from the S. E. to the N. W.; its entrance is a little to the left of the bay, and is rendered very difficult of passage by rocks at water level. The country produces about 4,000 pikuls of pepper; before the war it produced 10,000 pikuls.

from seawards, we gained the entrance of the port, but truly not without difficulty, for the breeze grew so faint, that our vessel, no longer answering to the helm, entered the port quite obliquely, under the influence of a current, which carried us within a few metres of the breakers near the entrance of the port.

The South entrance, by which we arrived, is splendid ; to the right is a volcanic isle, the foot of which is so hollowed by the waves, that from a distance it resembles an enormous mushroom ; its shores are very steep and quite denuded of vegetation, a few shrubs appearing on the summit only, but the natives assert that there is no path which will allow of an ascent so far.

In the bank which we are passing, the sea has hollowed out immense caves, where the swallow builds those nests so much sought after by Chinese gourmets.

On the side of the island facing the port, is a charming strand formed of sand and shells, and shaded by shrubs which are overshadowed by the crowns of countless cocoanut palms.

On our left, the line of breakers, upon which we had so narrowly escaped running, protects the port from the southerly squalls, and only leaves between it and the island of Klouwang a narrow passage 100 metres across. A little further on, a delightful stretch of sand extends to the foot of Mount Timbega (copper) [Malay "Těmbāga"], which is somewhat peculiar in shape ; it is an immense cone cut obliquely, which seems to have been deposited in the middle of the plain, whence it emerges as from the midst of an ocean of verdure. Its almost perpendicular steeps are clothed with an abundant vegetation, the deep hue of which contrasts forcibly with the brilliant white of the strand. The latter, after performing half the circuit of the port, stretches before us in a smiling valley closely walled in, and here, in the midst of a charming scenery, lies hid the *Kampong* (village) of Klouwang, and the little river bearing the same name.

The North entrance, while larger and more commodious than the Southern, is much less picturesque. It is formed by the island on one side, and on the other by a rather steep mountain lying on the left side of the mouth of the river Klouwang. Hardly had we dropped anchor before we landed on the island to examine carefully the strand which lay before us, and also, as will be readily

understood, to satisfy the longing which filled us to feel under foot something more solid than the deck of our schooner, which we had not left for ten days.

Nothing can be imagined so charming and so picturesque as this strand, which the island shelters completely from the fury and raging of the sea.

At some distance from the shore, which the waters gently caress, is hidden an Achinese dwelling, in a forest of cocoanut, areca, and other palms, which protect it from the solar rays; a little further off is a pepper plantation, admirably cultivated, where birds in the greatest variety sing to their hearts' content. As a background to the picture, rises the rocky mass of the island, presenting a vertical wall, cut, or rather torn about, in the strangest fashion, and covered over with a thick curtain of green, which seems to have been fastened to the points of the rock by some magician. Here Nature seems to have amused herself by gathering together the greatest variety of shrubs, and the most peculiar plants to be found in the tropical world; leaves displaying the greatest diversity of shape and colour combine with the rocky points, which here and there crop up, to form a wondrous mosaic.

A crowd of monkeys of all sizes disport themselves amidst the shrubs, which appear to cling to the rocks only by enchantment, and run along the monkey-ropes which droop in every direction, forming an inextricable net.

The island is composed chiefly of trachyte, crossed by numerous bands of quartz and porphyry. I noticed also in several places masses of selenite and melaphyre covered by overflows of lava.

On my return to the vessel, I was shewn enormous black puddings, about a foot long (0m.30 de long) among the coral rocks which skirt the shore; they are the "holothurion," or sea-leech, called "trîpang" by the Malays, who make it the object of an important trade; it is preserved, and highly appreciated by the Chinese.

The next morning we made the tour of the island in a boat. The rock, worn by the sea, in some places projects more than fifteen metres beyond its base. Every moment great birds (called in Malay "kâka") flew out of the corners in the rock with a great noise; they were armed with enormous yellow beaks, which seemed

to greatly embarrass the owners, and gave them such an original expression, that we were never tired of admiring them.

On turning the point of the island, I could not repress an exclamation of surprise. In front of us was a magnificent cave inhabited by millions of swallows, whose piercing cries mingled with the deep murmur of the sea, produced, on their reverberation from the distant depths of the cavern, an awe-inspiring sound, which had no ordinary effect upon the mind.

One could not but feel small in the presence of these grand phenomena of Nature, and silently wonder at the work and its Creator.

The first moments of wonder and admiration passed, we entered the cavern, an immense subterranean canal some fifteen to twenty metres high and ten to twelve metres in width : bambu scaffoldings, extraordinary at once for their lightness and boldness of construction, enable the A Chinese to collect the swallows' nests.

Ten metres from the entrance, a fresh surprise awaited us. A submarine communication between the cavern and the sea allows a gleam of light to penetrate at the bottom of the water, and this, in its passage, illuminates the fish whose scales flash countless colours scattering everywhere multicoloured reflections with fairy-like effect.

The subterranean canal soon turns to the right, penetrating into the heart of the island, whither it continues its course for a great distance, for the murmur of the sea reverberates endlessly ; but the darkness prevented our going any farther.

Between this point, E.S.E., and the port is another avenue, the two entrances to which are above the sea ; they are at an elevation, the one of twenty metres, the other of about thirty-five metres ; for some time we could not find a point where it was possible to land ; everywhere the sea-worn rock was vertical when it did not overhang us ; at last, two-hundred metres farther on, we found a spot where the rock had fallen down and where we could land ; we then contrived, sometimes by leaping from rock to rock, sometimes by making use of the unevennesses on the surface of the wall of rock, to reach the upper entrance, where a marvellous sight repaid us for our trouble. A vast cavern lay open before us. At our feet and

at a depth of about thirty metres was a black unfathomable gulf, whence arose the deep murmur of the waters. About fifteen metres below, to the right, was the other entrance, resembling an immense window opening upon the sea. Before us the cavern seemed to extend indefinitely into the shade, and the green and blue tints of the rock growing gradually darker and darker formed a strange contrast to the magnificent pearl-grey of the stalactites which hung on our right; above us the rock was of a dead white, whilst the floor of the cavern, which seemed to be the ancient bed of a torrent, presented a series of striking and sharply-marked tiers of colour, resembling a painter's palette. The most brilliant decorations of our pantomimes could give but a feeble idea of the magnificent tableau we had before us.

Leaping from rock to rock, we descended to the floor of the grotto, which is formed of pebbles and water-brought soil ⁽¹⁾; this floor rises with a gentle slope towards the interior; after one hundred paces all became so dark around us, that we were obliged to light torches; on every side crossed each other in flight millions of swallows, which deafened us with their piercing cries, while our torchlight lent to the gigantic bambu scaffoldings the most picturesque effect; every time they flared up the cavern was illuminated to great distances, and we suddenly perceived an inextricable web of bambus, white rocks and streamlets, which appeared to multiply as we advanced, when suddenly all vanished in darkness; the effect was most fantastic.

The soil of the cavern, in which we sank up to our knees, is light and dry, being formed of the excrement of the swallows; insects breed there in great numbers and the glare of the torches reflected on their armour produced a splendid play of light. The soil seemed made of precious stones flashing across at each other at our feet.

⁽¹⁾ The fact can only be explained by supposing that the floor of the cavern was originally below the level of the sea. It is one of many observations I have recorded, which shew indisputably the ascending movement of Malaya; this movement is being still continued in our time, as observations made at other points of the East and West coasts of Sumatra have shewn me.

As we advanced, the subterranean passages multiplied and grew narrower; it was a labyrinth out of which we thought at one moment we should be unable to find our way, for our torches were beginning to be used up, and we were not very sure as to the direction we ought to take. We now heard to the left a dull sound which indicated another communication with the sea, perhaps with the cavern we first visited. Then a little further to the right we descried a feeble glimmer of light at the vault of the cavern, but it was impossible to reach this opening, owing to its great height.

The cavern probably extends under a great portion of the island, but unfortunately our torches were burnt out, and we were obliged, to our great regret, to return to the ship without having explored the whole of it.

In the evening, the breeze became favourable, and at eleven o'clock on a splendid night, such as can only be seen in Malaya, we weighed anchor, carrying with us one of the most pleasing souvenirs of our whole voyage.
